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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - GREATER MIDDLE EAST - IRAQ - LEBANON - SYRIA

PARIS - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 09, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

GREATER MIDDLE EAST - IRAQ - LEBANON - SYRIA

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

FRONT PAGES AND EDITORIALS ARE FOR THE MOST PART DEVOTED TO DOMESTIC SOCIAL ISSUES SUCH AS DEMONSTRATIONS BY RESEARCHERS TODAY AND STRIKES SCHEDULED FOR TOMORROW. LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE IS THE EXCEPTION, WITH THE HEADLINE: "THE MIDDLE EAST IS CHANGING: SHOULD WE THANK BUSH?" THE UNSIGNED EDITORIAL TITLED "ARAB SPRINGTIME" GRANTS PRESIDENT BUSH'S POLICY PARTIAL CREDIT FOR THIS CHANGE. IN HER ANALYSIS, CLAIRE TREAN DESCRIBES PARIS'S STANCE VIS-A-VIS THESE CHANGES: "FOR PARIS, THE WAR IN IRAQ IS NOT THE DETONATOR OF THIS VIRTUOUS CHAIN OF EVENTS." (SEE PART C)

THE SITUATION IN LEBANON IS ALSO A MAJOR STORY. MOST COMMENTATORS NOTE THE SUCCESS OF YESTERDAY'S HEZBOLLAH-LED DEMONSTRATION. "THIS HUGE DEMONSTRATION PROVES THAT PRO-SYRIAN MOVEMENTS ARE VERY WELL ORGANIZED. IT ALSO PROVES HEZBOLLAH'S NEWLY ACQUIRED CLOUT." (THOMAS DE ROCHECHOUART IN FRANCE SOIR) IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO, COMMENTATOR ALEXANDRE ADLER ANALYZES THE CHANGES OPERATING IN LEBANON AND ASKS: "IS IT NOT A FACT THAT THE MIDDLE EAST IS EXPERIENCING THE PLEASURE OF VIRTUOUS CIRCLES?" (SEE PART C)

SEVERAL REPORTS NOTE JOHN BOLTON'S NOMINATION AS AMBASSADOR TO THE UN. FOR LE FIGARO, "THE NOMINATION MARKS THE LIMITATIONS OF GEORGE BUSH'S MULTILATERALISM." LE MONDE QUOTES JOHN KERRY'S REACTION, WHILE LIBERATION TITLES ITS REPORT: "BOLTON, AN AMERICAN HAWK FOR THE UN."

THE ASSASSINATION OF ASLAN MASKHADOV IS WIDELY REPORTED AND NOTED AS "AN IMMENSE VICTORY FOR PUTIN." BUT COMMENTATORS WARN AGAINST "A NEW CYCLE OF VIOLENCE IN THE REGION."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

GREATER MIDDLE EAST - IRAQ - LEBANON - SYRIA

"ARAB SPRINGTIME"  
LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE IN ITS UNSIGNED EDITORIAL (03/09):  
"EVENTS THESE LAST FEW WEEKS IN THE MIDDLE EAST ARE PROVING WRONG TWO PREVIOUS ANALYSES: FIRST, THE ONE SUPPORTING A `SHOCK BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS' BECAUSE THE ARAB WORLD WAS DEEMED IMPERVIOUS TO DEMOCRATIC CHANGE.; THE SECOND, PUT FORTH BY POLITICIANS CLAIMING TO BE `REALISTS' AND WHO CONTINUED TO SUPPORT AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES, FOR THE SAME REASONS INVOKED BY THE PROONENTS OF A `SHOCK BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS...' A NUMBER OF EVENTS (ELECTIONS IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, PALESTINE...) ARE ALL SIGNS THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE EAST WANT TO TAKE THEIR DESTINY IN HAND. WHILE IT BEHOOVES US TO REMAIN CAUTIOUS, THE FACT IS THAT THIS `ARAB SPRINGTIME' MUST BE ENCOURAGED. PRESIDENT BUSH'S MERIT LIES IN THAT HE HELD TO THIS APPROACH IMMEDIATELY AFTER 9/11. HE DEVELOPED THE IDEA THAT THE PEOPLE IN THE ARAB MUSLIM WORLD HAD THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND PROSPERITY. HE DID NOT SAY THIS ONLY BECAUSE HE IS ALTRUISTIC, BUT BECAUSE HE IS CONVINCED THAT SUCH AN EVOLUTION IS IN THE BEST U.S. INTEREST. MUST WE THEN SAY THAT BUSH AND HIS NEO-CONS CAN TAKE CREDIT FOR EVERYTHING THAT IS HAPPENING IN THE MIDDLE EAST? CERTAINLY NOT. NEVERTHELESS, THE EUROPEANS, WHO LOOKED ON THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST PLAN WITH MISTRUST, CANNOT LEAVE TO THE AMERICANS THE MONOPOLY OF DEMOCRATIC RHETORIC. WHILE THE EUROPEANS ARE RIGHT TO SAY THAT WITHOUT A SOLUTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT THERE CAN BE NO LASTING MODERNIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO MAKE IT A CONDITIONAL PREAMBLE. THE TWO MUST GO HAND IN HAND."

"FRANCE REFUTES THE `DOMINO THEORY'"  
CLAIREE TREAN IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (03/09): "FRENCH LEADERS NATURALLY DO NOT SHARE THE IDEA THAT THE WIND OF CHANGE BLOWING IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS EXCLUSIVELY DUE TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S POLICY. NO ONE IN PARIS DENIES THE INFLUENCE WHICH WASHINGTON HAS OVER THE REGION, OR THE PRESSURE ITS

MILITARY PRESENCE IN IRAQ CAN HAVE ON OTHERS. BUT THE IDEA THAT THE WAR IN IRAQ WAS THE DETONATOR OF A VIRTUOUS CHAIN REACTION OF EVENTS, IS CATEGORICALLY REFUTED."

"CLARIFICATION ON LEBANON"

ALEXANDRE ADLER IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/09): "IN THE SPACE OF A WEEK, THINGS HAVE BECOME MUCH CLEARER, NOT ONLY IN LEBANON BUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN GENERAL. THE MOST CLEAR-CUT DECISION IS THE IRREVERSIBLE ONE TAKEN BY SYRIA TO EVACUATE LEBANON. IN SPITE OF ASSAD'S TACTICS OF A PULLOUT IN TWO PHASES. IN EFFECT, LEBANON IS TRULY FREE TO ORGANIZE DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS, AFTER IRAQ AND PALESTINE. ONE OTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT IRAN, THE NEW REGIONAL HEGEMONY, IS NOT REALLY OPPOSED TO LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE. UN RESOLUTION 1559 INCLUDES NOT ONLY SYRIA'S WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON, IT DEMANDS THE DISARMING OF HEZBOLLAH. BUT WHY CHANGE APPROACHES, ONE FOR THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, ANOTHER FOR LEBANON? WHY NOT THE SAME STEP-BY-STEP POLICY FOR BOTH: FIRST TRULY FREE ELECTIONS THAT WILL ERADICATE SYRIA'S SUPPORTERS, AND LATER, MUCH LATER, DISARMING HEZBOLLAH COMPLETELY." LEACH